

Survey of Rooming Housing Conditions City of Toronto, 1920

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BOARD AND LODGING CONDITIONS IN TORONTO

A SURVEY of board and lodging accommodation in Toronto was made by the students of the class on "Industrial Investigation" (lecturer Dr. Riddell, Deputy Minister of Trades and Labour, Ontario) Social Service Department, University of Toronto, during January and February, 1920.

The Survey was made to obtain reliable data relative to the cost of living in Toronto for women and girls of the wage-earning class, to secure evidence in connection with the proposed legislation concerning a minimum wage for women in Ontario.

The houses visited by the students are mostly small apartment houses (originally they were probably private residences). They contain an average of 8 rooms per house and are situated in localities where it was believed working girls would be most likely to seek accommodation, and in proximity to the business section of the city. The streets selected were Jarvis, Bathurst, Dundas, Carlton, McCaul, Palmerston and Elm streets, Spadina avenue and Beverley road. Houses advertising or displaying cards for rooms to let were visited, and the selection was haphazard.

Points Noted by the Investigators.—The following points were especially noted, with a view to obtaining data as to the accommodation available, and to the cost for the same. Location, external and internal appearance of house; number of rooms in house, number of occupants and sex of the latter; size, heating, and furnishing of rooms; number of windows; number of toilets and bathrooms, and whether combined or separate; privileges, including the use of sitting-room, laundry, and housekeeping; cost of room per person and number of beds per room.

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Sixty-four houses were visited, and it was ascertained that, where reliable information could be obtained, 575 people were occupying 415 rooms (these including kitchens and living rooms). In one instance it was found that five families were living in the same house. Sixty-two of the houses visited contained only one bathroom and toilet combined, one contained three of each, and one contained one bathroom and two toilets.

Heating.—20 of the houses visited were considered to be insufficiently heated.

Furnishings.—Washing facilities are seldom provided in the bedrooms and in some of the rooms visited the bedding was poor and inadequate, the mattresses being of frazzle. On the whole, however, the furnishings seem to have been fairly satisfactory.

Lighting and ventilation varied considerably. In many instances the rooms visited were particularly dark and poorly ventilated.

Privileges.—Housekeeping privileges are allowed in 15 of the houses visited; laundry facilities in 25; use of living-room in 10 cases.

Both sexes are received in the majority of cases, though in a few instances girls are only received. One or two of the landladies stated that they did not allow their lodgers to receive male visitors.

Rents charged range from \$2 to \$6 per week for single rooms, and from \$2 to \$4 per person in double rooms. As a rule, the double rooms contain only one bed. In some cases three or four persons occupy two beds in the same room.

The accommodation given is very poor, considering the high prices charged. In many instances no service is given, the lodger being required to keep her room clean herself. The prices charged in Ottawa and Toronto appear to be about the same, whilst those charged in Montreal are still higher. Rents charged for rooms in old houses in poor localities appear to be almost as high, and, in some cases, quite as high, as those in better districts. For example, one room in an old house on Elm street is rented at \$5 per week. This room is insufficiently lighted and heated, the only heat being supplied by the kitchen stovepipe which passes through the room. The mattress is a frazzle one, and the bed-covering is very scanty and inadequate. Another room, also on Elm street, is rented at \$3 per week. This room is about six feet square, and is not heated.

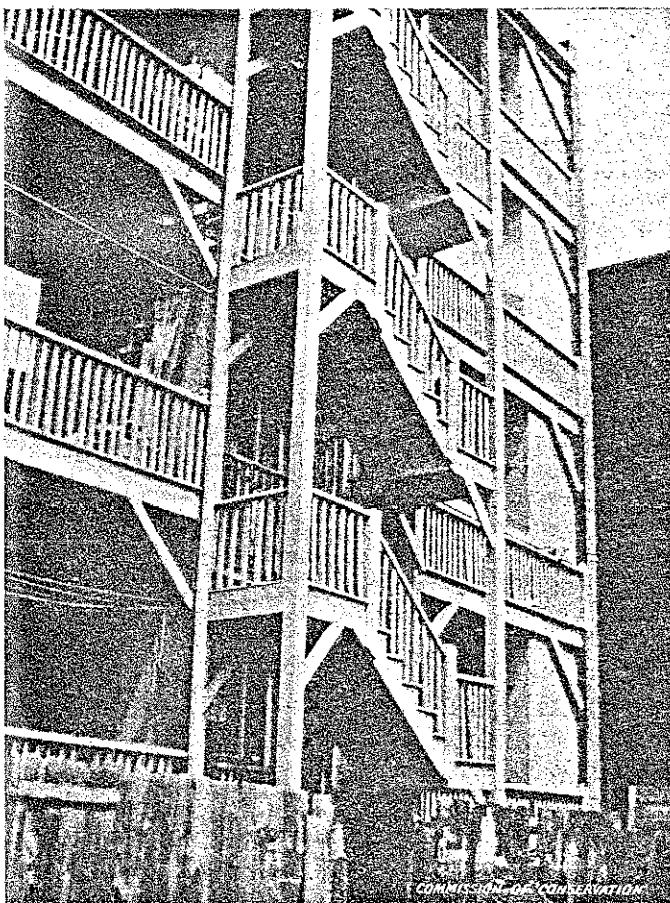
Bathroom and toilet accommodation is, on the whole, most inadequate. It is the exception to find washing facilities in the bedrooms, consequently all the roomers are obliged to wash in the bathrooms (the toilets with two exceptions, being placed in the bathrooms, as already stated). It is scarcely necessary to point out that this is a serious menace to the health and efficiency of the community.

Fire precautions are absent. Under existing legislation, houses of the size in question are not required to provide fire-escapes, and none of the houses visited was provided with fire-buckets or extinguishers. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that washing facilities are not provided in the bedrooms, therefore, the only place other than the bathroom from which water can be obtained is the kitchen. Should a fire break out, before it can be extinguished loss of life and property may ensue. The roomer usually has few personal effects, but a working girl cannot afford to lose any of her property. Though the householder's goods may be insured against fires, those of the roomer will not be included in his policy.

Absence of sitting-rooms in rooming houses is detrimental, and the moral aspect of the case is generally a serious one.

The use of double beds in rooms let to two or more roomers cannot

be too strongly condemned. In cases of sickness, as during the recent epidemic of influenza, serious risks are run when one of those sharing a bed falls sick. Many of the houses visited appear to be crowded to their capacity, and there is no possibility of isolating cases of sickness in the house. In one of the houses visited were six cases of influenza. This house contained 8 rooms and 20 occupants (this was a better class house, the rents charged being from \$2.50 to \$5 per person.)



TENEMENT HOUSE CONSTRUCTION UNDER THE LAW

In the event of fire, sixteen families must depend upon tinder-like wooden stairways and balconies as the only means of escape.

Light and Ventilation.—Too little attention is paid to the necessity of light and air to maintain efficient citizenship. Many rooms are extremely dark, and the sun's rays never enter. During the winter months the windows are kept closed to retain heat in the house. Bath-rooms and toilets may thus become extremely objectionable, and a danger to health.

While paying due regard to the liberty of the landlord, the right of the roomer to enjoy good health and protection against fire, etc., must not be overlooked. Numerically, at least, the lodger is greater than the landlord, and should he, or she, become inefficient through bad

living conditions, the financial burden must be borne by the community, while the individual becomes a burden to himself or herself.

Under the circumstances, therefore, it is advisable that the whole community should endeavour to bring about better living conditions for the increasing population.—*Edith E. Leach.*

HEALTHY DWELLINGS

THE three-flat house, or tenement, does not seem in favour in Toronto, because they believe it will degenerate into a slum. Dr. Hastings, Medical Officer of Health, has published an elaborate report on the subject, from which we extract the following passage:—

"It is universally admitted that the so-called cheap house, containing several flats, if it is not built according to all the rules of modern art, from the point of view of hygiene, and if it is not constantly inspected, tends to become rapidly a centre of physical and moral unhealthiness and to degenerate into a veritable slum."

The Mayor of Cincinnati said recently, that the city of which he is the first magistrate spent annually \$550,000 to arrest, house and feed the crowd of criminals and of such persons coming from those quarters where unwholesome and cheap houses abound.

If we wish to adopt a plan of wise construction it is necessary to give to each family its own house. If we wish to solve the problem of housing, it is necessary to give to our people a distinct and separate hearth and not a simple shelter, and he concludes:—

"In order to arrive at a practical and satisfactory solution of the great question of housing, it is absolutely necessary to obtain the co-operation of the Federal and Provincial Governments, of capitalists and the chiefs of industry."

Translated from *L'Administration*, Pointe-aux-Trembles, P.Q., April 24, 1920.

EXCESS CONDEMNATION AS AN AID IN CITY IMPROVEMENT

RAPID growth and the new traffic problems of large cities have in recent years developed an absolute need for comprehensive city planning which involves knowledge of existing conditions and study of the future growth, covering the proper relation of improved thoroughfares, boulevards, parks and recreation grounds. In securing such improvements through condemnation, the courts do not permit the taking of more land than is shown to be actually needed. This often results in leaving remnants of abutting parcels of land which are inadequate for proper building utilization, for which owners have been awarded damages to full value. With the right of excess condemnation the city would acquire sufficient abutting land to provide properly shaped building lots. These would be resold or leased, with suitable restrictions, if required, to protect the improvement, and the city would derive the benefit of enhanced values resulting from the development.

Briefly stated, the chief objects of excess condemnation may be enumerated as (1) the protection of thoroughfares, parks and public building sites from unsightly structures or neglected vacant remnants of land; (2) the securing of public improvements at little or no cost to the city, thereby making many schemes practicable that would otherwise be too expensive; (3) the correction of past mistakes in street widths and locations due to bad planning.